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Siena Group for Social Statistics

Report of the Siena Group for Social Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Siena Group for Social Statistics (secretariat: the Netherlands). The Commission may wish to review the work programme of the Group and comment on the direction of its future work.

* E/CN.3/2004/1.

** *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. I.A.

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Report of the Siena Group for Social Statistics

Purpose

To promote and coordinate international cooperation in all areas of social statistics by focusing on social indicators, social accounting, social reporting, concepts and classifications, and on analysis of the linkages and frameworks for integrating social, economic and ecological data for the purposes of policy formulation, analysis and monitoring. The Siena Group functions as an independent, focused and flexible think tank for the development of social statistics at the local, national and international levels by filling gaps not being addressed through international organizations and by identifying frontier issues not currently receiving enough attention.

Year organized

1993.

Participants

Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Economic Commission for Europe, European Union, Statistical Office of the European Union, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), affiliated with the United Nations, United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Development Programme, academic researchers.

Meetings and other events

1. Siena, Italy, October 1993.
2. Stockholm, June 1994.
3. Oslo, June 1995.
4. Paris, June 1996.
5. Neuchâtel, Switzerland, June 1997.
6. Sydney, December 1998.
7. Maastricht, the Netherlands, May 2000.
8. London, November 2002.
9. Budapest, November 2003.

Intermediate meeting on strategic short-term and medium-term goals: Geneva, December 2001.

International summer school on social statistics: Siena, 1998-2000. The summer school was organized by the Training Institute for European Statisticians and the Siena Group in cooperation with the University of Siena and sponsored by Eurostat. The programme was developed around three themes arranged over three consecutive

years. The first theme was "Inequality and equity" (1998), the second "Participation, discrimination and exclusion" (approached mainly from the meso level) (1999) and the third "Cohesion, integration and policy analysis" (approached mainly from the macro level) (2000).

Topics considered

1. National accounts, economic analysis and social statistics.
2. Social reporting and social accounting.
3. Monitoring social exclusion in education and labour markets.
4. Inter-generational relations and social mobility.
5. On the way to a multicultural society.
6. Families at the end of the twentieth century.
7. Accounting in social statistics and indicators for social development.
8. Concept and measurement of social capital.
9. Concept and measurement of crime, justice and safety.

Report of the 2003 meeting

Concept and measurement of social capital

On the topic of social capital, presentations were given by the European Commission on the theme "Social capital and the European social policy", by Statistics Sweden on the theme "Associational life in Sweden", by Statistics Finland on the theme "Assessment of experiences with measuring social capital", and by the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics on the theme "Measuring social capital in the United Kingdom".

Based on the discussions during the meeting, the Siena Group decided to finalize its work on social capital by producing a report. It was agreed that this would not constitute a handbook per se but an overall summary report from the Group covering such issues as the definition and policy relevance of social capital; methodological questions related to the measurement of social capital; national experience; and international harmonization. A completed draft will be endorsed at the next meeting of the Siena Group.

The Group decided on the following layout of the report on social capital:

Introduction

Part 1: What is social capital; policy relevance; view ahead (Coordinator: United Kingdom Office for National Statistics)

Part 2: Methodological questions (Coordinator: Statistics Finland)

Part 3: National experience and international harmonization, with a focus on best practices and lessons learned (Coordinator: Statistics Canada)

Appendix (e.g., Bibliography of relevant sources).

Relevant web sites: www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/; www.statistics.gov.uk/scqb/; www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/index.htm.

Concept and measurement of crime, justice and safety

On the topic of statistics on crime, justice and safety, presentations were given by the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control on the theme "International developments in statistics on safety, crime and justice", by the Italian national statistical institute Istat on the theme "The innovative contribution of the Italian victimization survey to the study of national criminality" and on the theme "Violence against women survey in Italy", and by Statistics Netherlands on the theme "Safety accounts: integration of statistics on safety, crime and justice".

The consideration of the current state of national and international statistics on crime, justice and safety resulted in a constructive exchange of views and experience and the Siena Group agreed to continue the discussion at its next meeting. In particular, attention should focus on the relevance of statistics on those topics (through a more focused dialogue with policy makers), data quality and international comparability, methods and techniques of combining data from different sources and on the measurement of fear of crime in society.

Measurement of literacy

Concerning the measurement of literacy, the Siena Group discussed in particular the design of the International Adult Literacy Survey and the questions that were raised about the validity and international comparability of its results. The United Kingdom Office for National Statistics presented a report entitled "What do we know about literacy surveys in the European context?". The French national statistical institute presented a study on the theme "Assessment of adult literacy", based on a French survey on information and everyday life.

Relevant web sites: www.oecd.org/edu/; www.pisa.oecd.org; www.ets.org/all/.

Use of administrative data in social statistics

The use of administrative data sources for social statistics needs to be strengthened. The following examples of the use of administrative data were presented: national statistics on waiting times for hospital services in Australia; a statistical system on persons, families and households in Norway; statistical data on labour market policy measures and unemployment in Denmark; statistical utilization of administrative data files in Hungarian social statistics.

Use of longitudinal data on persons

International collaboration in the area of production and analysis of longitudinal data needs to be fostered. The discussion on longitudinal data focused on the complementary use of the British Household Panel Survey and the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics longitudinal study, the gravity of panel attrition in the European Community Household Panel and the national longitudinal surveys programme in the United States of America.

Follow-up to the May 2003 expert group meeting on setting the scope of social statistics

Concerning the follow-up to the expert group meeting on setting the scope of social statistics, held in New York from 6 to 9 May 2003, the Siena Group discussed the 2004-2014 draft work programme for demographic and social statistics prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division. During the discussion of the work programme, the participants were reminded of the terms of reference of the Siena Group, i.e., to promote and coordinate international cooperation in all areas of social statistics and to act as an independent, focused and flexible think tank for the development of social statistics at the local, national and international levels by filling gaps not being addressed through international organizations and by identifying frontier issues not currently receiving enough attention.

With this in mind, the activities of the Siena Group and those of the proposed social statistics forum are considered to be complementary. With respect to the proposed activities envisaged for 2004-2006, the Siena Group considers that it is not structured nor has the resources to produce detailed handbooks, manuals or technical reports on the different areas of demographic and social statistics. The Siena Group can, however, advise on their contents, produce inputs for such products and discuss drafts at its regular meetings. The Siena Group would stress that before producing any such handbooks or other forms of output, it is important to clarify for whom these products are intended.

The Siena Group can also assist in organizing workshops on methodologies of demographic and social statistics, and members in their individual capacity can provide statistical training. During the discussion, it was pointed out that such workshops can never replace the regular Siena Group meetings, which have a different, more strategic and forward-looking focus.

In considering other aspects of the proposed work programme, the members of the Siena Group thought that it might also play a role in knowledge transfer to statistical offices in developing countries. Consequently, that item was proposed for discussion at the next meeting.

In addition, the Siena Group might also play a role in bringing together various international organizations working on a topic that was identified for consideration by the Siena Group. For example, the topic of the measurement of international migration was proposed for consideration at the next meeting, and it was suggested invitations be sent to a number of international organizations that were working on that topic.

More information

The full programme of the 2003 meeting and the papers presented are available at www.ksh.hu/sienagroup/.

Forthcoming meeting

The agenda of the next meeting of the Siena Group will include:

A. Concept and measurement of crime, justice and safety.

A1. Objectives and policy relevance of statistics of crime, justice and safety (organizer: HEUNI).

A2. Data quality and international comparability (organizer: Instituto nazionale di statistica, Italy).

A3. Methods and techniques of combining data from different sources (organizer: Statistics Netherlands).

A4. Measurement of fear of crime in society (organizer to be announced).

B. Concept and measurement of international migration (organizer: Statistics Norway).

C. Record-linking techniques (organizer: Statistics Denmark) (this session will also include a paper on international practices of dissemination of and access to microdata stemming from administrative sources).

D1. Current international statistical cooperation in the field of social statistics (rapporteur: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, France).

D2. Progress of the report on the concept and measurement of social capital (rapporteur: United Kingdom Office for National Statistics).

D3. Progress report on international measurement of adult literacy and life skills (rapporteur: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, France).

The next meeting is scheduled for early 2005 and will be hosted by Statistics Finland.

Bureau of the Group

The activities of the Siena Group are managed by a Bureau. The following members were elected to the Bureau at the last meeting: Pieter Everaers (Statistics Netherlands, Chair), Jil Matheson (Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom, Chair-elect), Michel Glaude (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, France), Alan Mackay (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Douglas Norris (Statistics Canada), Gerry O'Hanlon (Central Statistics Office, Ireland), Jussi Simpura (Statistics Finland) and Gabriella Vukovich (Central Statistical Office, Hungary).

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